

## GENERAL SYNOD

**London Diocesan Synod propose the establishment of a national ecumenical day of prayer and action dedicated to the persecuted church.**

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### Summary

The persecution of Christians worldwide is a deeply troubling issue, with millions facing discrimination, harassment, and violence due to their faith. This persecution manifests in various forms, ranging from social and economic discrimination to brutal acts of violence and even martyrdom.

The London Diocesan Synod recognises the severe and ongoing persecution faced by Christians worldwide. According to the 2023 Open Doors World Watch List, over 360 million Christians worldwide face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. In North Korea, where Christianity is illegal, believers risk imprisonment, torture, or execution. Similarly, in parts of the Middle East like Iraq and Syria, extremist groups like ISIS have targeted Christians, leading to mass displacement and atrocities. In China, the government imposes strict regulations on religious practices, frequently raiding and demolishing unregistered churches. Sub-Saharan Africa also sees severe persecution, with Nigeria's Boko Haram attacking Christian villages, churches, and schools, resulting in countless deaths and abductions. In Pakistan, blasphemy laws are often misused to unjustly imprison Christians and incite mob violence against them.

**As a response to this crisis, London Diocesan Synod propose the establishment of a national ecumenical day of prayer and action dedicated to the persecuted church. This day will serve as a unified call to prayer, reflection, and tangible support for our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ.**

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The persecution of Christians worldwide is a grave issue that affects millions of lives. It takes many forms and occurs in numerous regions, causing significant suffering and challenges for Christian communities. However, through awareness, advocacy, humanitarian aid, and prayer, the global community can support persecuted Christians and work towards a future where religious freedom is respected and protected for all. Examining data from reputable sources that monitor religious freedom and persecution provides an overview of the current state of Christian persecution worldwide, as recent global persecution statistics, regional data and reports indicate.

### Global Persecution Statistics

**1. Open Doors World Watch List (2023):** Open Doors, an international organization supporting persecuted Christians, publishes an annual World Watch List ranking the top 50 countries where Christians face the most severe persecution. Key statistics from their 2023 report include:

- **Countries with Extreme Persecution:** 11 countries are classified as having "extreme" levels of persecution. These include North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Pakistan.
- **Countries with Very High Persecution:** 39 countries are rated as having "very high" levels of persecution, such as India, Nigeria, and Iran.

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**2. Pew Research Centre (2021):** The Pew Research Centre conducts extensive research on religious restrictions and persecution. Key findings from their 2021 report include:

- **Countries with High or Very High Levels of Government Restrictions:** Approximately 57 countries have high or very high levels of government restrictions on religion.
- **Countries with High or Very High Social Hostilities:** Around 62 countries experience high or very high levels of social hostilities involving religion.

**3. Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) Report (2022):** ACN, a Catholic charity, reports on religious freedom and persecution. Key points from their 2022 report include:

- **Worsening Persecution:** In many countries, persecution of Christians has worsened over the past two years, particularly in regions affected by conflict and political instability.
- **Hotspot Regions:** The Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia remain hotspots for severe persecution.

### Regional Data

#### 4. Middle East and North Africa:

- **Iraq and Syria:** The Christian population in Iraq has dwindled from 1.5 million in 2003 to less than 200,000 today due to ongoing violence and persecution. In Syria, the Christian population has decreased by two-thirds since the civil war began.
- **Egypt:** The Coptic Christian community, representing about 10% of Egypt's population, faces frequent attacks and systemic discrimination.

#### 5. Sub-Saharan Africa:

- **Nigeria:** Over 4,000 Christians were killed in 2022, and more than 2,300 were abducted by groups like Boko Haram and Fulani militants.
- **Somalia:** Christianity is almost entirely underground due to severe persecution by Al-Shabaab and other militant groups.

#### 6. Asia:

- **China:** The Chinese government has intensified its crackdown on Christians, with thousands of churches closed and countless believers detained. Surveillance and repression have increased significantly under President Xi Jinping's regime.
- **India:** There were over 500 reported incidents of violence against Christians in 2022, including beatings, arson, and forced conversions, often perpetrated by Hindu nationalist groups.

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**7. Latin America:**

- **Mexico:** Christian leaders who speak out against drug cartels and corruption are frequently targeted. In 2022, there were numerous reported cases of intimidation, abduction, and murder.
- **Colombia:** Christians, particularly in rural areas, face threats from guerrilla groups and criminal organizations opposing their social and religious activities.

**Impact on Christian Communities****8. Decline in Population:**

In Iraq and Syria, the Christian population has dramatically decreased due to ongoing conflict and targeted persecution. In Nigeria, the persistent violence has forced many Christians to flee their homes, significantly reducing the number of Christian communities in certain areas.

**9. Displacement and Refugees:**

Millions of Christians have been displaced internally and internationally, particularly from the Middle East and parts of Africa. Refugee camps and host countries face the challenge of accommodating these displaced populations.

**10. Psychological Trauma:**

Survivors of persecution, especially those who have faced violence or imprisonment, often suffer from long-term psychological trauma. Support services for mental health and rehabilitation are crucial but often lacking.

**11. Resilience and Growth:**

Despite severe persecution, many Christian communities continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience. Underground churches grow, and faith often deepens under pressure, inspiring global Christian solidarity and prayer.

**The Rationale for this proposal includes:**

**12. Solidarity and Support:** A National Day of Prayer will unite Christians across denominations in solidarity with persecuted believers, demonstrating the Church of England collective commitment to supporting them through prayer and action.

**13. Awareness and Advocacy:** This dedicated day will raise awareness about religious persecution, encouraging congregations to engage in advocacy efforts that can influence policymakers and promote religious freedom globally.

**14. Practical Assistance:** The day will also focus on action, encouraging fundraising and resource collection to provide practical support to persecuted communities through partner organizations.

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**15. Spiritual Renewal:** Engaging in prayer and reflection on this day will deepen our faith and commitment to living out the gospel, inspired by the courage and resilience of persecuted Christians.

**Conclusion**

The extent of Christian persecution worldwide is vast and multifaceted, impacting millions of believers across numerous regions. This persecution includes social and economic discrimination, legal restrictions, physical violence, and imprisonment, severely affecting Christian communities. Despite these challenges, the resilience and faith of persecuted Christians continue to inspire and call for global awareness, advocacy, and support. By understanding and addressing this persecution, we can work towards a world where religious freedom is upheld and protected for all. We urge the General Synod to adopt this motion, thereby reinforcing our commitment to global Christian solidarity and support. Let this day serve as a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness as the body of Christ and our duty to stand with those who suffer for their faith. I move this motion standing in my name.

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